

## **MEDIA OUTREACH** **(Effective Media Relations/Etiquette)**

Today, revolutionary changes are taking place in the media. And, they are taking place with blinding speed. There has been an expansion of media outlets of every kind. Those outlets have a voracious appetite for news and information. At the very forefront of change is the Internet, which pours information into millions of homes every moment of the day. It knows no limits, and respects no boundaries. An outcome of this revolution is that there are more opportunities for telling your story than ever before.

There is no question that taking advantage of media coverage of your story offers many benefits. A well-placed story can call attention to the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* program, increase credibility, and provide opportunities to reach target audiences with important messages about reducing air pollution and traffic congestion.

But, there are potential pitfalls. Because there are so many outlets and so many messages competing to capture the public's attention, competition is fierce. One unfortunate result is that accuracy has sometimes suffered when reporters on deadline rush to get a story on the air or into print. Facts may not be checked and incorrect information may reach the public. In this climate, it is necessary to make sure that you provide information about your program that is complete, accurate, and up-to-date.

### **Who Are the Media?**

The types of media available to you depend on the size of your community. In large metropolitan areas, there are multiple media contacts at daily and weekly newspapers, as well as radio and television stations. Smaller cities will have fewer publications and television and radio stations, but almost all cities have some media outlets.

Following is a list of some media vehicles that could carry your message to various target audiences:

- Radio news departments, including traffic and weather reporters
- Television news departments, including traffic and weather reporters
- Cable television programs such as national networks-TLC, Discovery, and Weather Channel
- Cable access channels such as local government/county stations
- State or city wire news services
- Daily newspapers, especially “environmental editors” and “automotive editors,” along with reporters assigned to the metro and business sections of the paper
- Weekly newspapers
- Specialized, ethnic, and minority newspapers
- Radio talk shows
- Television talk shows
- Newsletters (club, corporate, Chambers of Commerce)
- College and university newspapers

- Association publications
- The Internet, including media outlets with home pages on the World Wide Web.

## **Working with the Media**

Once the key elements of your program are in place, contacting reporters and editors should become an important part of your efforts. Establishing a good relationship with local editors and reporters will help you achieve successful results.

## **Targeting the Media**

The first step to reaching the media is to generate an up-to-date media list. After reviewing the types of media outlets in your area, develop a list of contact names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and fax numbers of all the publications, stations, and other sources you want to receive information. It is also helpful to make a habit of noting any reporter/station that recently wrote an article or aired a story about transportation, environment, health, traffic congestion, or air quality, or who has requested information from you for a possible segment, because they are already familiar with your organization or your issues. See “Media Advisory” in Tab I for detailed information on developing a media list.

## **Establishing Relationships with Local Editors and Reporters**

Once your transportation/air quality program is established and you are ready to begin media activities, make initial contact with your local editors and reporters, especially those covering transportation and environmental topics. Good relationships with the press are based on mutual interest, trust, and respect. Try to get to know key editors, reporters, and news directors in your area. Your relationships with the media will continue to strengthen if you contact them on a regular basis, and many reporters will genuinely appreciate your efforts to assist them.

## **Monitoring the Media**

A good way to determine which reporters might cover transportation and air quality is to regularly monitor the news. If you are working with a newspaper reporter, read that reporter’s columns as often as possible. If you are pursuing a particular television talk show host or news assignment editor, watch the program so that you know what kinds of topics are being explored. Similarly, if you are working with a radio personality or news assignment editor, learn as much as you can about their programs. For example, if a radio station broadcasts syndicated news (recorded stories from a broadcast wire service that provides regional or national coverage) and only adds a minute or two of local news, then you need to tailor your request for coverage to a sound bite or a brief mention of the program rather than a longer interview.

By understanding a reporter's area of expertise, you will be better equipped to inform that reporter about your program and how it may fit into the program’s format.

## Hold a Background Session

A background session is an informal one-on-one meeting or lunch where you familiarize the reporter with your organization, activities, and plans to make the public aware of the program, its needs, and accomplishments. These sessions are an excellent way for you or your spokesperson to develop a relationship with an editor or reporter.

One-on-one meetings are also an ideal opportunity to get to know a reporter who is responsible for a particular Abeat@ (e.g., environmental or automotive issues). Periodic one-on-one meetings can help you find out what stories most interest the reporter and issues of current concern.

When you meet with the reporter, provide him or her with information on your organization and the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* program, such as the *It All Adds Up* marketing kit and a fact sheet with relevant local data.

## Contacting Different Types of Media

Over time, you probably will expand the “universe” of media outlets that you want to support *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* objectives. Certain guidelines, such as being conscious of deadlines and promptly returning calls, will enhance your relationships with media representatives. Each medium has its own preferences for receiving information and it is critical that you become familiar with them.

### *Wire/News Services*

Wire and news services provide newspapers with international, national, regional, and local news. They offer chains of newspapers and individual subscriber papers a continuous flow of information. As a result, stories very often appear in papers unedited and bylined to the service. In addition, major newspapers such as the *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Los Angeles Times* operate news services to which media outlets can subscribe. All of them are important outlets for news and information. Major wire services such as the Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), and Reuters have regional offices in many large cities around the country.

If you have a wire/news service in your area, send them information about your program just as you would any other media outlet. While wire service reporters are among the busiest in the industry, it is possible to reach them. The “bonus” with a wire service placement is that your story could reach many prime media outlets throughout your region.

### *Newspapers*

There are two main objectives when communicating with a newspaper reporter. First, to ensure that articles about your program=s activities are accurate and include your key messages. Second,

if your organization schedules a special event or press conference, to encourage newspaper

reporters to attend and cover it.

Generally, newspaper reporters like to be called early in the morning and early in the week. Check with the publication to determine its editorial deadlines. Morning newspapers may have a 2:00 or 4:00 p.m. deadline, so you'll have the best luck reaching reporters in the morning or early afternoon. Ask your contacts what they prefer.

Information about media events is most effective when delivered (via fax or mail) one week in advance. Reporters usually do not plan their schedules any earlier than that. Be sure to follow up with a phone call to determine interest.

### *Local Magazines*

Your objective when communicating with local magazines is to ensure that stories about your program are accurate and include your key messages. Unlike newspapers, editorial deadlines for monthly magazines are usually two or three months in advance of the publication date (and can be longer), because most magazines are feature-oriented. Researching and writing these in-depth stories require more time than daily newspaper articles. Therefore, it's best to send a letter or place a phone call promoting your ideas and offering to draft an article or provide background materials. Follow up on letters and maintain contact. When planning your timeline, be sure to account for the magazine's extended deadlines.

### *Radio and Television*

There are two different paths to approaching radio and television stations, news departments, and talk shows. News departments are interested in timely and/or human interest stories such as a breaking story, new program statistics, or a profile of the program. For special event coverage, send your information to the news assignment or planning editors at the stations' news departments. Typically, news assignment editors prefer information packaged in a media advisory, which is a one-page notice in bullet-point format. See "Media Advisory" in Tab I for an example. Media advisories are most effective when faxed a few days to a week before the event.

Station producers put together taped or live talk shows, where guests discuss an issue or event. Generally they schedule interviews two to three weeks in advance, so begin planning early. Send a one-page news release or a letter to the producer and follow up with a phone call. Offer one or more guests who can speak authoritatively about the topic and your program. Radio interviews sometimes can be conducted over the phone. If you are attempting to schedule an interview related to an event, try to schedule it the day of or the day before the event.

When planning to contact a television station about a story idea, think visually. If possible, provide assignment editors with ideas for visuals, such as people, places, graphics, or live action.

### *Local Cable Television*

In the last decade, local cable programming has become an important source of coverage for local issues and events. Most cable stations have talk shows that feature local experts speaking about a variety of topics. Some cable programs are taped, while others are live.

The best way to arrange for your spokesperson to appear on a local cable station is to send a letter describing the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* program to the assignment editor or producer of a specific show. Then, follow up with a phone call to ascertain interest. Send your letter or materials, including ideas for visuals, about two weeks in advance of an event or when you would like the story aired.

### *The Internet*

The Internet rapidly has become a profound force in global communications. Worldwide, millions of people are connected “on-line” each day. In addition to being an extraordinary and inexpensive source of information about issues and developments in your field, the Internet also offers you excellent opportunities to disseminate information about your program to targeted audiences if you establish a web site. That said, web sites require care and attention.

If you decide to have a web site, consider hiring a professional who has the skills and knowledge to design an effective site. A web site also requires maintenance. It is a good idea to add new information and delete old information periodically in order to keep it fresh, up-to-date, and interesting. It also is advisable to have your web master check out the site at least quarterly and re-subscribe your web address with various search engines to ensure that they continue to connect visitors to your site. For example, the search engine Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>) has a link at the bottom of its home page called AHow to Suggest a Site@ that includes directions for how to list your web page.

The Internet also allows you to send messages via electronic mail (e-mail). Some reporters prefer to receive press releases, story ideas, or other media materials by e-mail. As more and more members of the press corps rely on e-mail, it rapidly is replacing distribution by fax or regular mail. However, it still is best to ask reporters how they prefer to receive your information.

### **Preparing for Interviews with Reporters**

There are two basic types of interviews: pre-arranged and impromptu. Pre-arranged interviews allow you to anticipate questions from reporters and prepare your responses. Impromptu interviews occur when a broadcast or print reporter contacts you for on-the-spot information. Whether you are your program’s spokesperson or the program’s coach, here are some basic tips:

#### *Before the Interview:*

- Try to find out what major points the reporter wants to cover. Do not assume you know what the reporter is planning. If it’s a broadcast interview, will there be other guests? Will the interviewer be probing or conversational?

- Determine your key messages – the two or three main points you would like to make in order to communicate your story effectively. Broadcast interviews are generally shorter than print interviews; therefore be especially crisp and focused for these interviews.
- Rehearse with a colleague, family member, or friend.
- Clarify details. You have rights as well as responsibilities. You can and should get answers to basic questions such as whether a broadcast interview will be live or taped, whether other people will be involved, the length of the interview, whether a broadcast interview will be edited or run unedited, and when the interview is scheduled to run. These basics will help you better prepare for the interview and result in a more professional, relevant exchange.

*During the Interview:*

- Choose your site. In the case of television, exploit that it is a visual medium by well-thought-out site selection. The location may even result in a one- or two-minute interview being extended, because the cameras can pan to a visually interesting scene instead of being limited to “talking heads.”
- The credibility of your presentation is greatly affected by the way you look and sound. It is just as important to be professionally attired for a print interview as for a television interview. For television, you (or your spokesperson) should wear conservative colors and clothing for the interview. A light blue shirt, navy blue or medium to dark gray two-piece suit, and conservative tie (stay away from busy prints) are good for men. Women should wear bold, solid colors and subtle makeup. Large and heavy jewelry is both noisy and distracting and should be avoided. Smile and look at the interviewer – the television camera tends to make people look more serious than they are, and unfocused eyes make a person appear uncomfortable or defensive. Remain relatively still, because unnecessary movement makes you appear nervous or disinterested.
- Maintain control of the interview. One way to do this is to treat the questions as topics. When a reporter asks you a question, steer the conversation to your key points, even if the reporter is not specifically addressing these issues.
- Keep answers brief and to the point, but do not merely answer “yes” or “no.” Make one or two statements that emphasize your key messages. In the course of the interview repeat key points two or three times; in other words, *tell them and tell them again!*
- If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Tell the reporter you will get back with the answer.
- If you don't want to answer a question, tell the reporter why. If possible, tell him or her when you can answer it. Never say “no comment,” because it implies that you are hiding

something.

- If you think a reporter may have misunderstood a statement, restate important points and clarify complicated topics. Don't let incorrect information stand.
- At the start of the interview, try to “bridge” to your key points. Television interviews are notoriously short, often lasting just a few minutes or even seconds; therefore, it is important to think creatively about your message. Be succinct. Get key points across early in the interview and in an interesting manner.
- Remember nothing is “off the record,” even casual comments you make before or after the interview. If you don't want to see it in print (or hear it on the air), don't say it.
- If a question contains words you don't like, or is pejorative, do not repeat it and restate it the way you would like it said. Never get mad or show annoyance. Every answer should sound like you just said, “I’m glad you asked...”
- If a reporter asks a direct question, try to give a direct answer.
- Make your responses colorful. Reporters are looking for unusual and dramatic responses. Use anecdotes, examples, and other interesting ways of illustrating your points.
- Make your point. If the interview is coming to an end and you have not conveyed your main message, be bold and tell the reporter you would like to make one last important point.

#### *Following the Interview:*

- Thank the reporter for the interview.
- Ask if the reporter needs any further information.
- If it is a print interview, ask for a “quote check.” This means the reporter will review the finished piece with you and you can ask him/her to change a quote if it was printed out of context or is something you did not mean to say. You may not be given this opportunity – reporters and editors are protective of their stories C but it never hurts to ask.

### **Media Relations Summary**

Following is a summary of the more important rules of media etiquette. You will have a better chance of placing a story if you follow these simple rules:

- Gather all the facts before contacting reporters.
- Always have someone proof/double-check materials before you produce or mail them.

- When calling a reporter, identify yourself and then ask the reporter if he or she is working on a deadline or has a few minutes to speak with you. Reporters are always busy, so don't be alarmed if they tell you that you've called at a bad time. Find out when would be a better time to call; reporters will appreciate your sensitivity to their tight schedules.
- Return calls promptly. If you keep a reporter waiting for information needed to finish a story, chances are the reporter may cut out your information altogether.
- Observe reporters' deadlines. If you have promised information at a specific time, make sure it gets there.
- Speak with one voice via a designated spokesperson(s). This will establish consistency and make it easy for reporters to remember who to contact the next time. Don't give the impression that you are controlling the story by keeping reporters from other professionals.
- Be accessible to the media. The easier you are to contact, the more likely a reporter will be to include your information in a story.
- Never say anything you don't want or expect to appear in print or be heard on air. For some reporters, there is no such thing as "off the record," so think before you speak.
- Prepare for the interview. Rehearse key points and anticipate important questions.
- Don't fill in the silence.
- If a reporter asks for information your organization does not handle, explain that you do not have that information. If possible, offer a source that can provide the information.
- Answer questions briefly and to the point. If you cannot answer a question, explain why. Don't hesitate to say, "I don't know," but follow up with, "I will find out and get back to you."
- Do not be intimidated by reporters and editors. Just be yourself. Editors and reporters can be abrupt, but this could just be because they are pressed for time. It does not mean that they won't be interested in your information. Simply offer to call back when they have more time.
- Make key points early and repeat them, if possible. Be creative in crafting your message. Find ways of briefly but vividly expressing your message, especially when doing radio and television interviews.